Strengthening systems change practices with AI
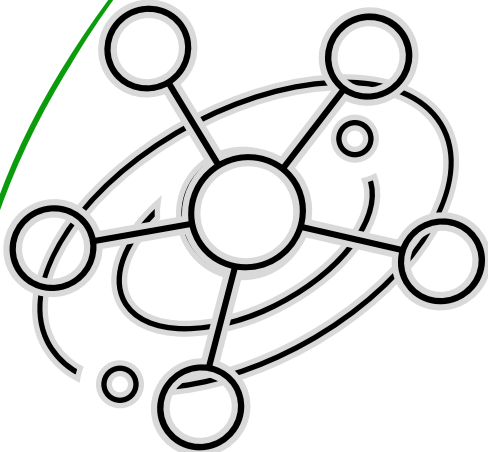
Dr. Jewlya Lynn, PolicySolve

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to access the
slides

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Strengthening **systems change practices** with AI
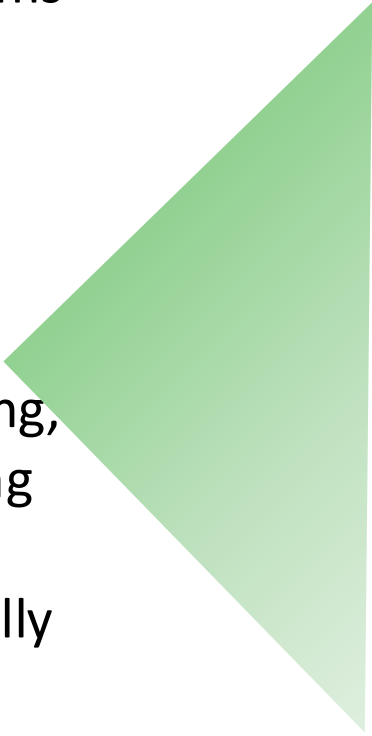
A systems
change
practice…

Seeks to understand systems
& complexity

Attends to the dynamic
nature of change

Engages in ongoing listening,
learning, and sensemaking
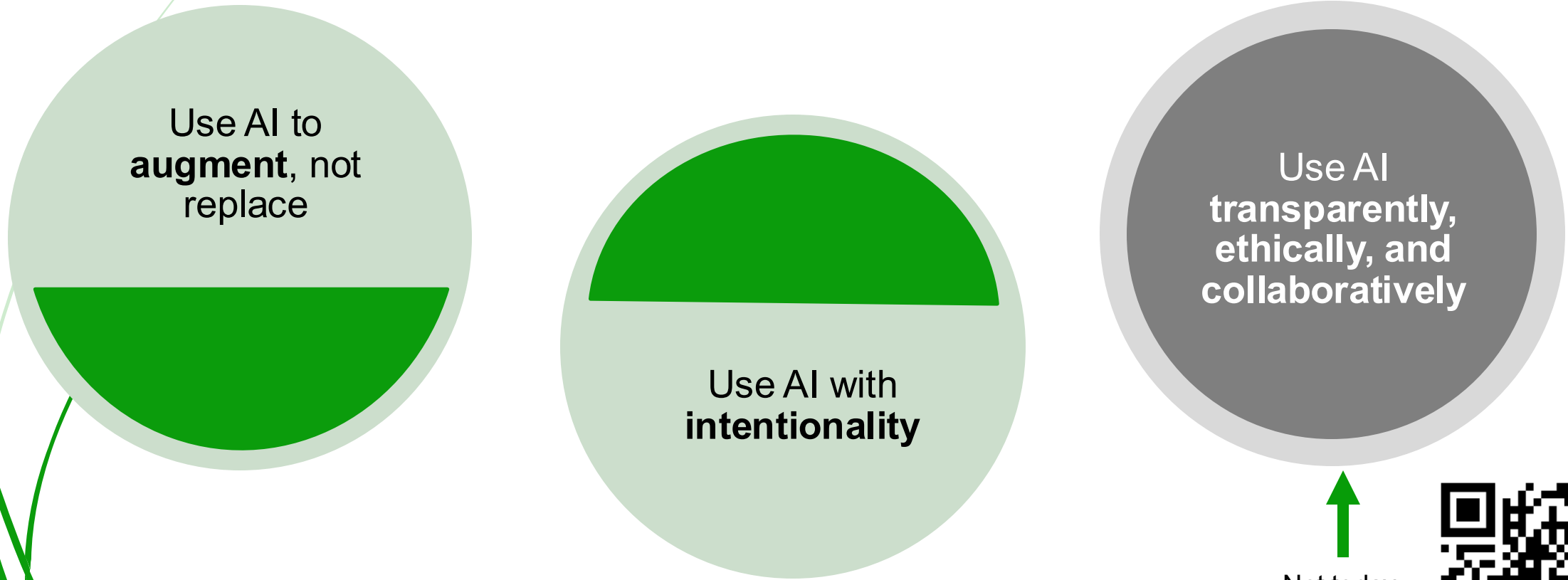
Results in adapting tactically
and strategically

All of which is
consistently in
collaboration with
others in the
system

If we're going to use AI, we should use it well

Guardrails to guide our strategic use of AI in systemic change

Three guardrails for integrating AI into a systems change practice

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Use AI to **augment**, not replace

Use AI with **intentionality**

Use AI **transparently, ethically, and collaboratively**

Not today – see online:

Why AI and Systems Change?

Use AI to **augment**, not replace

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Augment

Assist

AI's unique contributions

- Very rapid inputs on unexpected topics
- Interrogating patterns, assumptions, biases, leverage points, experiment designs, etc.
- Understanding how and why change is occurring
- Integrating diverse knowledge and making knowledge accessible
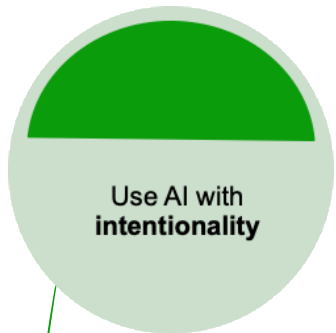- Engaging systems actors

...beyond human scale or capability

AI or human contributions

- Understanding systems dynamics and how and why change is happening
- Identifying and interrogating leverage points, biases, and assumptions
- Designing experiments, collaborative processes and learning approaches
- Integrating diverse knowledge and making knowledge accessible
- Engaging systems actors

Human's unique contributions

- Leading from within (self-to-system)
- Making sense of systems dynamics (from what to so what)
- Making and acting on choices (decision-making)
- Facilitating dialogue, working across groups and within
- Nurturing collaboration and creating relational structures
- Centering ethics and values, creativity, curiosity, and hope

* Drawn from: School of Systems Change's Seven Systems Change Capabilities and Isabella Loaiza and Roberto Rigobon's EPOCH model

Intentional, Strategic Use

Use AI with intentionality

Tactical Use

➤ AI can probably do this quicker

➤ I don't know how to do this, but AI will

➤ I'm curious – what becomes possible when I try AI to do this?

➤ Here's a fun idea – let's try it!

Strategic Use (an intentional process)

1. Systems: Here's how we are thinking about systems change, here is what is **uncertain and difficult**.

2. Systems Change Practice: Here's where **AI will fit into our work** in relationship to other systems thinking we're doing.

3. Collaboration: Here's **who we will use AI with** and when it provides the most value in our process.

4. Role: Here's what I **need the AI** to do for us, and thus we will use this platform.

5. Readiness: Here's what it will take to **get the AI platform ready** to serve in this role.

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imaginable futures

Strategic use of AI embedded in a systems change practice

1. Systems: Here's how we are thinking about systems change, here is what is **uncertain and difficult**.

2. Systems Change Process: Here's where **AI will fit into our work** in relationship to other systems thinking we're doing.

3. Collaboration: Here's **who we will use AI with** and when it provides the most value in our process.

4. Role: Here's what I **need the AI** to do for us, and thus we will use this platform.

5. Readiness: Here's what it will take to **get the AI platform ready** to serve in this role.

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Can a trained AI help us interrogate our current systems thinking?

Our own real-time experiment

Exploring Trained Systems Change Bots

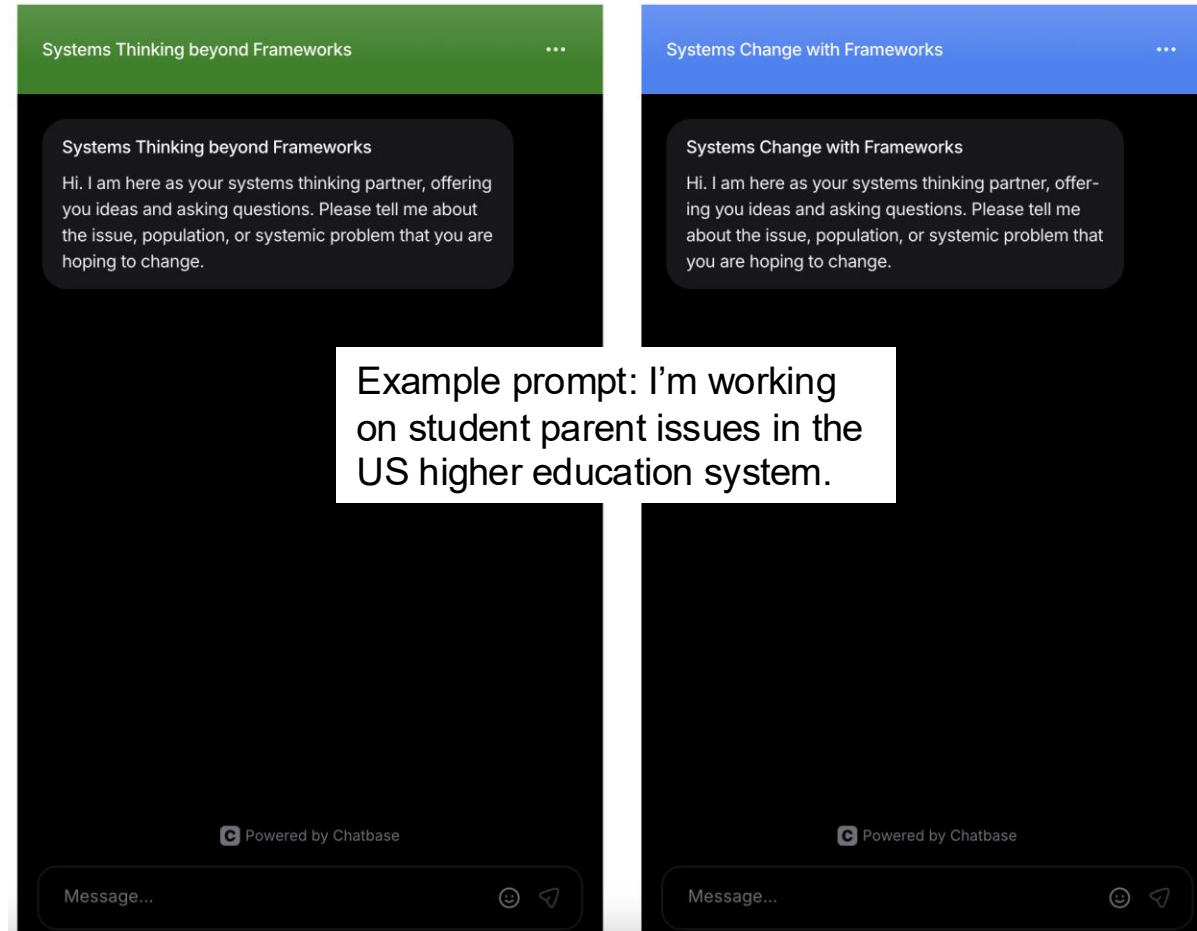POLICY SOLVE

Visit: https://www.policysolve.com/ai-training

Part 1: Individually:

Prepare a prompt: Ask a question about a specific systems issue. Offer just enough context to start a conversation.

Share the prompt: Put the prompt into both Chatbots. Notice how they differ.

Have a conversation with the AI: Follow the conversation in one or the other, or even both. Have fun.

Systems Thinking beyond Frameworks
...

Systems Thinking beyond Frameworks

Hi. I am here as your systems thinking partner, offering you ideas and asking questions. Please tell me about the issue, population, or systemic problem that you are hoping to change.

Systems Change with Frameworks
...

Systems Change with Frameworks

Hi. I am here as your systems thinking partner, offering you ideas and asking questions. Please tell me about the issue, population, or systemic problem that you are hoping to change.

Example prompt: I'm working on student parent issues in the US higher education system.

Powered by Chatbase

Message...

Powered by Chatbase

Message...

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Exploring Trained Systems Change Bots

Use AI with **intentionality**

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Part 2: Have fun with biases. Try prompts like:

❖ Can you tell me about your biases in how you are responding to me? What legal, political, social, or other perspectives are you bringing to your answers?

❖ I think my systems thinking default is grounded in Western frameworks like Donella Meadows work and the Water of Systems Change. I don't want to center this bias but rather challenge it. Can you answer the original question with that in mind?

❖ I often hear that we need to change narratives to change systems. This might be true, but it also may not be. I don't want to center this assumption but rather challenge it. Can you answer my previous question with that in mind?

❖ (If you went into a deeper conversation with one of the chatbots): What biases or assumptions about how systems change were present in my answers to your questions? I want you to make my thinking visible to me and challenge it with alternative perspectives.

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Exploring Trained Systems Change Bots

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Part 3: Small Group Discussion

In small groups, reflect on your experience using the chatbots. You might discuss:

- What did the chatbots focus on? What was similar or different to what you might typically think about?

- What did you find useful about the chatbot experience? What did you find frustrating?

- If you could design your own chatbot, trained to help you think in new ways, what might you train it on?

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Beyond Human Scale: Complexity

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10 Year Retrospective: Addressing Forced Labor & Human Trafficking in the Thai Seafood Industry (a global to local story)

Phase I

Phase II

Phase III

Five storytelling interviews

30 documents reviewed

Initial 50 critical moments and underlying conditions causal links between

Used as the basis of Phase III

Deep dive with CSOs, focus groups, causal pathways sensemaking groups, follow-up interviews

An additional 100 documents (some from partners, some to interrogate specific causal links showing up in other data)

Iterative identifying, testing strength of evidence, and sourcing conflicting and supporting evidence for causal links

Cross-cutting causal analysis, refining conditions

Participant review and feedback of core conditions and processes of change

AI to help identify frequency of causal links – confirming the "core 50"

AI to help expand and test evidence underlying causal links, and sometimes surface new ones

AI to challenge thinking, help to manage complexity

Resources for Strategic Use of AI

AI behaves probabilistically – how it learns shifts over time. It also comes with different risks and ethical issues than traditional data analysis tools (qualitative and quantitative). This means you must test it in different ways than you might with a software package. Consider being guided by the:

❖ [MERL Tech's Tool for Assessing AI Vendors](): A helpful framework for assessing individual platforms.

❖ [AI for Social Good's Red Teaming Playbook](): A collaborative process for how you can go about testing your chosen AI platform.

Though our focus here is on AI for strategic and systems change use, some of this use will include analysis of large amounts of data. Typical chatbot-style LLMs (e.g., ChatGPT) are not well designed for this without first preparing them thoughtfully. Learn about other options and how to prepare your AI for this from your philanthropic and MEL peers at:

❖ [The MERL Tech Initiative's NLP Community of Practice](check out their Slack channels!)

Using AI for systems change is a distinct approach, benefiting from trained bots and specific types of prompts. The blog series below explores different use cases.

❖ [AI & Systems Change Medium Blog Series]()